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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEGUCIGALPA 002492

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA, WHA/PPC, WHA/USOAS, AND WHA/CEN
NSC FOR DAN FISK

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SUBJECT: A ZELAYA ADMINISTRATION - WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR
THE USG ON POLITICAL ISSUES?

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 2461 AND PREVIOUS

- [1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 2445
- [1](#)C. TEGUCIGALPA 2420
- [1](#)D. TEGUCIGALPA 2419
- [1](#)E. TEGUCIGALPA 2418

Classified By: Ambassador Charles A. Ford;
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In somewhat surprising election results, Liberal Party presidential candidate Manuel "Mel" Zelaya is now the President-elect. While Zelaya is viewed as a friend of the USG, his personality, administration, and likely "government plans" could make working with him an interesting challenge. In an early test, Zelaya has already shown that he is willing to take a politically painful decision on an issue of great concern to the USG by switching his publicly announced choice for Foreign Minister. Zelaya and nearly his entire senior team also warmly welcomed the visit of U/S Karen Hughes. The future Zelaya administration will not likely result in any changes that would have a significant negative impact on U.S. interests and provides many opportunities for forward progress. One thing is certain: his victory means a complete upheaval of the GOH with Liberals coming in to replace the Nationals at senior, mid-level, and even lower level positions. End Summary.

Honduras' Position in the International Arena -----

[1](#)2. (C) According to President-elect Manuel "Mel" Zelaya's government plan, his administration's main focus in international relations will be to prepare Honduras for a more aggressive, independent and competitive face on the global scene. With the implementation of CAFTA, and Honduras' imminent emergence into the global economic market (ref C-E), Zelaya apparently hopes to increase Honduras' political clout. As his plan suggests, Zelaya realizes that Honduras currently holds very little geo-political power, but thinks it can still play an important role in international affairs.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Zelaya's long term international strategy is based on the theme of economic and political integration with the surrounding countries. Zelaya sees the integration of Central America as the only viable means Honduras has to meet the increasing demands of globalization. The unification of Central America is not a new idea, dating back to Honduras' independence from Spain. However, recently it has resurfaced as an issue of increasing importance with CAFTA. Zelaya has made clear that integration is an issue of prominence to him, suggesting not only economic, but also political cooperation in other areas.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Potential integration does not end with Central America. Zelaya has also indicated that the nations of the Caribbean provide a prime arena for further integration and cooperation. He suggests that Honduras finish defining maritime borders with several of the Caribbean nations and work towards greater co-dependence. Zelaya intends to maintain relations with Cuba (the GOH has still not established a defined maritime border with the GOC) and plans to send an Ambassador there (see paragraph 7). As a long term projection, Zelaya ultimately views an integration of Latin American nations that stretches from Mexico to South America, although this is clearly not a goal he will accomplish in his four year term.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Short of integration and increased cooperation with the countries directly surrounding Honduras, Zelaya has specific intentions to develop and strengthen relationships with several countries both in the Western Hemisphere and overseas that have been named by Zelaya as important to Honduras' national interests: Brazil, Argentina, Chile, India, Indonesia, Russia, and South Africa.

Chavez, Castro and an Alleged Leftist Connection -----

[1](#)6. (C) While Liberal Party President Patricia Rodas and some other prominent Liberals (such as Jorge Arturo Reina,

Zelaya's first choice as Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Milton Danilo Jimenez Puerto, his second choice as FM) are known leftists, Zelaya and key Liberals (including Rodas and Jimenez) go out of their way to make clear they value the bilateral relationship with the USG and sluff off allegations (usually made by the National Party) of collusion with the Sandinistas, Cuba, Chavez, etc. Rodas herself is a good contact of the Embassy. The Embassy has not seen any proof of the allegations of leftist campaign financing from outside sources.

17. (C) It will likely be harder for Honduras under a Liberal Party Administration to vote with the USG on certain issues in international fora (such as UNCHR resolutions on Cuba) due to leftist pressure within the party. Zelaya himself criticized the Maduro Administration for drafting the 2004 UNCHR Cuba resolution, partially for what he claimed was hypocritical behavior. (Note: However, it should be noted that President Maduro took flack from other Nationalists for some of his anti-Cuba votes in international fora. In addition, the Maduro Administration, despite lots of grumbling about possible questionable activities by Cuban doctors in Honduras, in the end never terminated the program.

End Note.) Zelaya's campaign manger (and now chief of transition issues and future Minister of Finance) Hugo Noe Pino told PolChief December 3 that the Zelaya government will have a centrist, practical, non-ideological government. Noe Pino said that while Zelaya intends to send an Ambassador to Cuba, he does not intend to alter the relationship between the two countries as maintained under the Maduro Administration, and sees a transition coming relatively soon, hopefully to a democratic government. Likewise, Noe Pino said there were no plans to change the status of the relationship with Venezuela. Noe Pino said a Zelaya government projects no change in relation with Taiwan or China, and Zelaya plans to visit Taiwan soon to cement that relationship. (Note: The GOH currently has diplomatic relations with Taiwan, not China. End Note.)

18. (C) In an early test, Zelaya has already shown that he is willing to take a politically painful decision on an issue of great concern to the USG by switching his publicly announced choice for Foreign Minister. At Washington's request, PolChief made it clear to Noe Pino December 3 that the Embassy and Washington had great concern about the appointment of Jorge Arturo Reina as the Minister of Foreign Affairs due to his background as a Communist with strong anti-U.S. views. Noe Pino said he understood why the USG would be concerned about Reina. Ambassador reiterated the same points in a December 5 morning phone conversation with Zelaya, in which Ambassador emphasized that as someone currently ineligible for a visa, Reina could not even travel to the United States at present. Zelaya said he did not realize that Reina was such a problem. Zelaya phoned the Ambassador late the afternoon of December 5 to say that Reina would not/not be the Foreign Minister. He subsequently nominated Liberal Party official Milton Jimenez as Foreign Minister.

National/Public Security and Anti-Crime Initiatives

19. (C) In regards to a National Defense strategy, Zelaya has given little public information or hint as to what his plans might be. He has said that he will work to modernize the armed forces to make sure they have the technical instruments and specialized resources necessary both to defend the country and to give assistance to the police when needed. During the campaign Zelaya reached out privately to DAO and MILGP to indicate an interest in discussing defense issues after the election.

110. (SBU) While Zelaya has not declared what specific public security measures he will set in place, he has made clear that he holds an entirely different approach to the gang problem than did the Maduro Administration before him or the National Party/Pepe Lobo campaign. Zelaya insists that the promise of "zero tolerance," a reference to the National Party's unforgiving anti-gang law, has only created more citizen insecurity. Instead of focusing on increasing punishments and penalties for crimes, the Liberal Party's Government Plan provides three areas where the administration will focus their efforts: prevention, enforcement, and rehabilitation.

111. (U) According to his campaign rhetoric, Zelaya strongly supports the rehabilitation of criminals, especially past gang members, preferring a multi-disciplinary approach that utilizes governmental programs as well as NGOs with rehabilitation projects. He has stated that the community should work with the government through a diverse, decentralized effort in order to best provide the resources and cultural support to fight this problem. Zelaya has made clear that he intends to closely monitor any human rights violations of convicted criminals.

112. (SBU) Zelaya names prevention as the most important

factor to citizen security; however, he has yet to provide any specific plans for how he will actively prevent crimes from occurring. To address the root causes of criminality, Zelaya emphasizes consolidation of the legal framework, preventative education, and institution of programs to better citizens' quality of life. While Zelaya's focus lies strongly in this area, the level to which these vague promises will become actualized as policy has yet to be seen.

13. (SBU) Zelaya has called for increased enforcement of pre-existing Honduran laws. Zelaya is opposed to the death penalty, an issue which was raised by National Party presidential candidate Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo during the campaign and a possible factor in Lobo's defeat in still-heavily Roman Catholic Honduras. However, Zelaya maintains that life sentences should be given to those who have committed severe crimes or have been part of organized crime; he has promised to create more maximum security prisons for highly dangerous convicts. Zelaya's strongest enforcement promise has been to increase the police force by 2,000 officers each year until the number reaches 8,000. This would be a substantial increase to the power of the police force in Honduras. Maduro effectively avoided this urgent need for more cops by boosting police patrols with military forces under "Honduras Segura," which was a temporary band-aid at best.

14. (C) While not yet clearly articulated, Zelaya may plan to consolidate the military and police under the authority of a national security advisor. Such a policy could meet with resistance among both police and military leaders, in addition to a public wary of integrated security forces during the 1980s. Zelaya and his advisors also identified counternarcotics as a priority for his Administration in conversations with the Embassy and U/S Hughes.

Government Decentralization and Transparency

15. (C) Zelaya and his key advisors have discussed with EmbOffs the importance of the decentralization of the GOH, something that the Maduro Administration, especially with Jorge Ramon Hernandez Alcerro as Minister of Government and Justice, fought. He plans to do this through the National Plan for Integral Development. Zelaya's government plan views increased power to the municipalities as the key to transparently and effectively reducing the poverty of the country. He aims to transfer more power to the mayors of the various cities, allowing them to pursue projects that are of interest to that particular area. Each municipality will be charged to form and execute a Strategic Plan of Development. In particular, local municipalities are promised much greater control over land ordinance and use of natural resources. Whether a Zelaya Administration will be able to resist the temptation to hoard the resources and power that they pledge to distribute to the 298 municipalities is an open question. Zelaya's pledge of "Citizen Power" implies much greater participation in decision making by citizens, and greater local control over resources. Post notes that Zelaya used the same slogan in his 2000 primary race.

16. (C) Zelaya has stated that he intends to fight for transparency in government. This is a mighty goal that will be extremely hard to accomplish without real political will to persevere in the face of the constant push-back from the elite of both major parties, the oligarchic business community, and organized crime to defeat any attempts at battling corruption. Whether Zelaya has that will could prove to be the real test of his administration.
Ford